ONE WEEK AGO...

CLICK

(ALL)

CHKT

ALERT, BLUE TEAM! OUR CONTROL POINT IS BEING *CONTESTED!*

RED (ALL)

CHKT

WELL DONE, RED TEAM. YOU HAVE CAPTURED THE CONTROL POINT.

BLU (ALL)

CHKT

CAPTURE OUR *CONTROL POINT*, BLUE TEAM!

RED (ALL)

CHKT

RED TEAM! *DEFEND* OUR CONTROL POINT!

HM. WELL NOW. WHAT'S THAT SPY UP TO?

CHKT ALERT!

A *RED SPY* IS IN THE BASE!

UNPLUG

A RED SPY IS IN THE *BASE?*

UGH.

THE *SCOUT*, YOU IDIOTS.

HE'S DISGUISED AS THE *SCOUT*.

IS THERE A *PROBLEM*, MISS PAULING?

UM.

WHAT... MAKES YOU SAY—

BECAUSE YOU'RE *HOVERING*. AND YOU ONLY HOVER WHEN THERE'S A *PROBLEM*.

LET'S HAVE IT.

WE DID A BACKGROUND CHECK ON THE MERCENARIES.

STANDARD PROTOCOL, NOTHING—

SOMETIME *TODAY*, PLEASE.

UM.

IT'S THE... BLU SOLDIER AND RED DEMOMAN.

IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'VE BECOME...

...*FRIENDS*, ADMINISTRATOR.

TWITCH

FOR HOW LONG?

HOW DID WE NOT KNOW ABOUT THIS?

WITHIN THE LAST SIX MONTHS, ADMINISTRATOR.

AS FAR AS WE CAN TELL, THEY MET AT A PROJECTILE WEAPONS EXPO.

IT, UH... SEEMS TO HAVE BLOSSOMED INTO A LIFELONG FRIENDSHIP.

HEH. YOU KNOW, FORGETTING FOR A MINUTE THAT WE DON'T CONDONE FRIENDSHIP, IT'S SORT OF...

ALMOST...

UH...

REPREHENSIBLE. TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY REPREHENSIBLE.

WE ARE IN AGREEMENT, MISS PAULING.

THIS FRIENDSHIP IS A ***PROFOUND*** BETRAYAL OF OUR TRUST.

WHY, FRIENDS COULD EASILY...

COULD...

HM.

MISS PAULING, YOU STRIKE ME AS THE SORT OF PERSON WHO WOULD HAVE *FRIENDS*.

TELL ME...

WHAT DO THEY ***DO?***

UM. GO SKATING...

LOOK AT GUN CATALOGS...

SOMETIMES WE JUST *TALK*...

TALKING? FRIENDSHIP IS EVEN WORSE THAN I THOUGHT.

NO, THIS WON'T DO AT ALL.

IF THEY TALK, MISS PAULING, THEY MIGHT TALK ABOUT WORK.

AND IF THEY TALK ABOUT WORK...

THEY MIGHT TALK ABOUT ***US***.

THIS IS WHAT WE WILL DO.

CALL MISTER HALE.

TELL HIM THAT WE HAVE SOME CUSTOM ORDERS FOR HIM.

TELL HIM MONEY IS NO OBJECT.

AND TELL HIM WE NEED THEM ***RIGHT NOW.***

YES, MA'AM. ANYTHING ELSE?

OPEN CHANNELS TO OUR TWO NEW BEST FRIENDS.

I HAVE A PROPOSITION FOR EACH OF THEM.

IN MY EXPERIENCE, MISS PAULING, NOTHING KILLS A FRIENDSHIP FASTER...

...THAN A ***HEALTHY COMPETITION.***

SIR, YOU SHOULDN'T JUMP YET! WE'RE TOO LOW! IT'S NOT *SAFE!*

I KNOW THE RISKS, JERRY! BUT I'VE GOT *DAMN GOOD MEN* DOWN THERE WHO NEED ME!

TELL *THEM* IT'S NOT SAFE ENOUGH!

BUT SIR, I– I CAN *CLIMB* TO A SAFE ALTITUDE.

IT WILL LITERALLY TAKE SECONDS, IF YOU'LL JUST–

TELL THOSE *MEN DOWN THERE* YOU CAN "CLIMB TO A SAFE ALTITUDE"!

ME, I'D RATHER GET DOWN THERE AND TELL THEM MYSELF...

AT LEAST TAKE THE BACKUP PARACHUTE!

WITH *MY BARE HANDS!*

BRAVE JUMP!

THERE'S PROBABLY NO TIME!

READER, IF YOU THOUGHT THE ***FIRST TWO PAGES*** OF MY COMIC CONTAINED TOO MUCH BARE-KNUCKLE EXCITEMENT, THEN GET READY TO HAVE YOUR ***EYES BREAK*** FROM WIDENING IN SURPRISE AND YOUR COMIC-HOLDING HANDS ***FALL OFF YOUR VERY ARMS*** WHEN YOU GET A LOOK AT THE REST OF THIS ACTION-PACKED ISH, STARRING ME...

SAXTON HAAAALE!

IF THIS SENSATIONAL ISSUE DOESN'T STOP YOUR ADRENALINE-GORGED HEART FOR ***FIVE ENTIRE SECONDS***, I WILL SEND YOU A NOTARIZED CERTIFICATE CONFIRMING ***YOU DO NOT EXIST!***

HOW AM I SO SURE? I HAVE ***SELF-CONFIDENCE!*** ALSO, JUST THREE PAGES FROM NOW, I WILL BEAT UP A ***PARKING LOT FULL OF HIPPIES.*** I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T BLAME YOU IF YOU SKIP AHEAD! I AM! FOR THE REST OF YOU, READ ON AS I...

...BARREL ROLL DIRECTLY INTO MY OFFICE AT MANN CO. HEADQUARTERS!

MR BIDWELL! HOW DID MY LANDING COMPARE TO YESTERDAY'S?

BE FRANK WITH ME NOW. I'M MADE OF STERN STUFF.

HUP! HUP!

HAHRUP!

FLAWLESS ROLL!

TEARS WERE BROUGHT TO THE EYES, SIR.

YOUR BREAKFAST STEAK.

IT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT STEAK OF THE DAY, BIDWELL.

MR. REDDY! HOW'S ACCOUNTS?

YOU'RE NOW THE SIXTH RICHEST MAN IN AMERICA, MR. HALE.

NOM NOM NOM

TOP DRAWER! SEND THE OTHER FIVE A CONGRATULATORY BOUQUET AND MY "YOU'RE A DEAD MAN" FORM LETTER.

WHAT'S NEXT?

THERE'S A GROUP OF HIPPIES PROTESTING IN THE PARKING LOT AGAIN...

THE *SCOUNDRELS!* WHAT HAVE THEY GOT THEIR SMELLY PONYTAILS IN A TWIST ABOUT *THIS* TIME?

GUNS, SIR. THEY'RE AGAINST THEM.

FINE. I'LL BEAT THEM TO DEATH WITH *MY BARE HANDS!*

TF INDUSTRIES IS HOLDING ON LINE ONE, SIR.

WHAT? WHY DIDN'T YOU *SAY* SO, MAN! DON'T LEAVE *HELEN* ON HOLD!

HELENNNN! YOU CHAIN-SMOKING SEDUCTRESS!

DO YOU STILL LIKE STEAK DINNERS AND SEX WITH HANDSOME MEN?

MISTER HALE, THIS IS MISS PAULING. I *WORK* FOR MISS—

EXCELLENT! MY OFFER STILL STANDS! WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, MISS PAULING?

WE NEED TO RESOLVE A, UH...

PERSONNEL PROBLEM.

WE WERE HOPING YOU COULD PROVIDE THE INCENTIVES.

OPEN!

IT JUST SO HAPPENS MY BOYS IN R AND D SENT UP A FEW CRATES OF ***HIGHLY EXPERIMENTAL NEW ORDINANCE*** THEY WANTED ME TO TAKE FOR A TEST DRIVE.

WHY DON'T I SEND ***THOSE*** OVER? HOLD ON, BIDWELL'S GESTURING FRANTICALLY TO ME ABOUT SOMETHING...

SIR, THOSE WERE THE WEAPONS YOU ASKED US TO SEND UP SO YOU COULD ***DESTROY*** THEM BEFORE THE SENATE INVESTIGATION.

I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE— OOO, *RIGHT*. THAT POOR MONKEY.

WELL, NEVERMIND THAT. HELPING HELEN OUT'S MORE IMPORTANT.

ALSO GETTING SOMEONE ELSE'S FINGERPRINTS ON THESE THINGS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. I WON'T LIE TO YOU BIDWELL, WE ARE IN A ***LOT*** OF TROUBLE HERE.

MISS PAULING, STILL THERE?

UM... I HEARD ***EVERYTHING*** YOU SAID, MISTER HALE.

FANNNNTASTIC. AND?

WE'LL TAKE THEM.

PROBLEM SOLVED!

MR. REDDY! WE'RE GOING TO NEED SOME AMBULANCES!

MR. BIDWELL! I NEED AN ALIBI THAT PUTS ME ANYWHERE BUT THE PARKING LOT FOR THE NEXT SEVEN MINUTES!

THROW

LET'S GO KILL SOME HIPPIES!

BADLANDS, NEW MEXICO

FOR THE LAST *TIME*, MUM. I DON'T *HAVE* TO GO TO WORK. IT'S ME MORNING OFF.

"MORNING OFF"? OH, LORD HELP ME, YOU'VE BEEN *FIRED*. I KNEW IT.

SIGH NO, MUM. IT'S JUST THE ONE MORNIN'.

OH, WELL, THAT'S *FINE* THEN, I'M SURE.

I JUST WISH YOUR POOR OL' DA COULD TAKE A MORNING OFF. FROM *SPINNIN' IN HIS GRAVE AT YOUR IDLENESS!*

I'M HOLDIN' DOWN *THREE JOBS*, MUM.

THREE JOBS! HA! *LISTEN* TO HIM!

TAVISH, YOUR FATHER, GOD REST HIM, HAD *TWENTY-SIX JOBS!* AND HE *STILL* FOUND THE TIME TO TEACH YOU THE FAMILY TRADE!

I MADE FIVE MILLION DOLLARS LAST YEAR, MUM. WE LIVE IN A MANSION.

AYE, AND WHO *TOLD* YOU TO BUY A BLOODY MANSION, I'D LIKE TO KNOW.

THESE'RE YOUR *PRIME EARNING YEARS*. YOU'RE HALFWAY TO RETIREMENT ALREADY.

MARK ME, BOY: NO DEMOMAN WORTH HIS SULFUR EVER HAD AN EYE IN HIS HEAD PAST *THIRTY!*

MM-HM. TEA'S UP, MUM.

IT WASN'T *EASY* BRINGING YOU UP SCOTTISH, LAD.

LEAN YEARS. IN THOSE DAYS YOU COULD BOMB MERCS *ALL DAY* AND STILL NOT HAVE ENOUGH FOR A LOAF OF BREAD.

YER DA WALKED FIFTEEN MILES IN THE RAIN TO BLOW UP THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND FOR A *NICKEL!*

I'LL GET MORE JOBS, MUM. I PROMISE.

I JUST HATE TO SEE YOU SQUANDERING YOUR GIFTS.

I KNOW, MUM.

I MISS HIM, TAVISH. EVERY DAY.

I KNOW, MUM.

KNOCK KNOCK

BLOODY HELL, ME ONE MORNIN' OFF...

DRINK YOUR TEA, MUM. I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.

MISTER DEGROOT?

TAVISH? WHO IS IT?

SOMEONE FROM WORK, MUM!

ASK HIM HAS HE GOT ANY MORE JOBS!

HERE, I KNOW YOU. YOU'RE THAT WEE LASS, WORKS WITH THE ANGRY LADY WHO'S ALWAYS SCREAMIN' AT US WHILE WE FIGHT.

SHE'S NOT SO BAD ONCE YOU GET TO KNOW HER.

REALLY. AND WHAT'S SHE WANT, THEN?

SHE'D LIKE YOU TO KILL YOUR BEST FRIEND.

THE EYE [illegible]DER

IN EXCHANGE, WE'LL GIVE YOU ***THIS***.

ARE YE SERIOUSLY ASKING ME TO BETRAY ME BEST MATE FOR A ***WEAPON?***

HA! I'VE GOT A *LITTLE* MORE INTEGRITY THAN THAT, LASS. I...

I...

OH MY.

WHAT'S ***YOUR*** NAME, YOU DIRTY GIRL?

CREAK

SHING!

THIS... IS THE EYELANDER.

PATTERN-WELDED DAMASCUS STEEL.

HARMONICALLY BALANCED.

SLOW-FORGED FOR ***GENERATIONS*** IN THE BOWELS OF CAPTURED ENGLISH KINGS.

...headdddds...

headheadheadheadheadheadhead

WHOCK!

RRRAGHHH!

UM.

AND IT'S ***HAUNTED.***

BLAST YE, WOMAN. MAKING A MAN CHOOSE BETWEEN HIS BEST FRIEND AND A SWORD.

ACH. NO. NO, I COULDN'T. SOLDIER'S ME BEST MATE.

TELL YOU WHAT. WHY DON'T I LEAVE THEM HERE, AND YOU CAN THINK ABOUT IT.

"THEM"?

I SHOULD GET GOING.

MANN CO.

MANN CO.

OH, AND MISTER DEGROOT?

YOUR FRIEND'S EMPLOYERS MADE HIM THE SAME OFFER.

HE SAID YES, MISTER DEGROOT.

ENJOY YOUR MORNING OFF.

THIS IS THE PLACE.

MISTER JANE DOE

NO SOLICITORS! DO NOT TEST ME

HHT. FOR THE MONEY WE PAID YOU TO FIND IT, IT HAD BETTER BE.

YOU'RE WASTING MY TIME. GO KNOCK.

KNOCK KNOCK

GOOD.

NOW DUCK.

CH-CHOOM
CH-CHOOM
WHO IS IT?
SAY, FRIEND! WHY DON'T YOU MOVE A LITTLE CLOSER TO THE DOOR?
THAAAT'S IT. DON'T BE SCARED. I JUST WANT TO–
HUTTAH, NECK SNAP!
TOK
TOK
ALRIGHT, YOU CAN COME IN.
UNLOCK
UNLOCK
UNLOCK
UNLOCK
UNLOCK
UNLOCK
UNLOCK

100 CANS
CAPTAIN DAN'S ARMY SURPLUS SOUP
100 CANS
CAPTAIN DAN'S ARMY SURPLUS SOUP
UNLESS YOU'RE THE ***TOMATO SOUP WHOLESALER*** OR A ***NEW DELIVERY MAN*** FROM THE RIB PLACE...
...YOU HAVE JUST ENTERED A ***DOORWAY OF HURT*** INTO AN ***APARTMENT OF PAIN***, SON.
THE RIB PLACE
THE RIB PLACE
GUNS AND HAIRCUTS MAGAZINE

FLASH!

GOOD LORD NO!

TELL ME, MISTER DOE...

CLK

DO YOU KNOW WHAT A *CONFLICT OF INTEREST* IS?

CAN I GUESS?

NO.

YOU DON'T OWN ME! YOU JUST TRY AND *STOP* ME, LADY.

IT IS A FORM OF COMBAT!

NO.

A BREED OF DOG!

I'M AFRAID NOT.

IT IS KNOWING WHAT WORDS MEAN! *THESE ARE GUESSES*

MR. DOE. YOU HAVE BEFRIENDED A MAN WE ARE *PAYING YOU TO KILL.*

AS SUCH, YOU HAVE TWO OPTIONS. *ONE:* MY ASSOCIATES WILL DRIVE YOU TO THE NEAREST GRAVEL PIT...

OO! THAT ONE.

-WHERE THEY WILL *KILL* YOU FOR YOUR GROSS INSUBORDINATION.

WAIT. LET ME HEAR BOTH CHOICES FIRST.

OPTION TWO...

YOU KILL *THIS* MAN. AND WE SUPPLY *YOU* WITH THE *CUSTOM-BUILT WEAPONS* YOU'LL NEED TO GET THE JOB DONE.

THEN I GUESS YOU'D BETTER TAKE ME TO THE GRAVEL PIT AND ***SHOOT*** ME, LADY.

'CAUSE IF YOU EVER ASK ME TO KILL MY FRIEND AGAIN, I WILL PUT MY ***BOOT SO FAR UP YOUR ASS*** IT WILL BE ON THE ***NEWS***.

THAT'S NOT THE OPTION ***HE*** TOOK FROM ***HIS*** EMPLOYERS.

HE AGREED TO KILL ME FOR WEAPONS? ***HA!*** I DON'T BUY IT, SISTER.

LISTEN FOR YOURSELF.

BZZT I-WILL-KILL-THE-SOLDIER. *BZZT*

BZZT HE-IS-A-BAD-FRIEND. *BZZT*

AHHHH, BUT *DAMMIT*– IT DOESN'T MATTER ***WHAT*** HE SAID IN THAT WEIRD ROBOT VOICE I'VE NEVER HEARD HIM TALK IN BEFORE.

ONCE YOU'VE TAKEN A MAN OUT FOR WHISKEY AND RIBS... THEN ***FOUGHT*** HIM... THEN FOUGHT THE ***POLICE*** WITH HIM...

WELL, YOU HAVE FORGED A BOND THICKER THAN ANY SOUP YOU CAN BUY.

THAT'S NOT GIRL TALK, EITHER.

THAT IS JUST ***FACTS.***

NO DEAL, PUMPKIN. FIND YOURSELF ANOTHER PATSY.

BZZT HE-IS-NOT-A-REAL-SOLDIER. *BZZT*

BZZT HE-WAS-NOT-EVEN-IN-THE-ARMY. *BZZT*

BZZT HE-IS-A-FRAUD. *BZZT*

BZZT HE-IS-A-CIVILIAN. *BZZT*

CIV... CIVILIAN?

HE PROMISED HE'D NEVER...

HOW ***DARE*** HE? I EARNED EVERY ***ONE*** OF THOSE MEDALS I MADE! I DID ***THREE*** GODDAMN TOURS OF DUTY OVERSEAS, AND I WASN'T EVEN ***ASKED!*** I ***PAID*** MY DUES! ***AND*** MY PLANE TICKET OVER!

I..

HE...

HE IS A DEAD MAN!

I BELIEVE WE HAVE A DEAL, MR. DOE.

THERE WILL BE A NEW WEAPON WAITING FOR YOU EVERY DAY UNTIL THE JOB IS DONE.

THE FIRST WEAPON WE'LL BE SENDING YOU IS A ***PRECISION INSTRUMENT.***

IF YOU WERE BLASTING AROUND RANDOMLY, IT WOULD BE USELESS TO YOU.

HOWEVER, I THINK YOU'LL FIND IT USEFUL FOR SHARP-SHOOTING... ***SPECIFIC ENEMIES.***

PAULING, KILL THE FEED, PLEASE.